

Message Text

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SINGAPORE 4409

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, PINT, SN

SUBJ: LEE KUAN YEW ON COMMUNIST SUBVERSION IN SINGAPORE

REF: A. SINGAPORE 2140, B. SINGAPORE 3125

1. SINGAPORE'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS ON SEPTEMBER 22/23
PUBLISHED TEXT OF SEPTEMBER 14 INTERVIEW OF LEE KUAN YEW BY
BBC'S SOUTHEAST ASIA CORRESPONDENT ADRIAN PORTER. IN ADDITION
TO RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNIST SUBVERSION
IN SINGAPORE, LEE PROVIDED HIS VIEWS REGARDING VIETNAMESE-
ASEAN RELATIONS AND ON THE SRV APPLICATION FOR UN MEMBERSHIP
(SEPTEL).

2. ON WHETHER COMMUNIST SUBVERSION HAS PERVADED SINGAPORE
SOCIETY, LEE STATED THAT COMMUNIST SUCCESSES TO DATE, AS
EVIDENCED BY RECENT ARRESTS, INDICATE THAT IT HAS BEEN PRIMARILY
THE "LOWER SOCIAL, ECONOMIC GROUPS OR STRATA -- NOT VERY DEEP"
WHICH HAVE BEEN AFFECTED. LEE RECOUNTED THAT COMMUNISTS HAVE
BEEN ABOUT THEIR WORK LOCALLY "SINCE 1933 WHEN TWO AGENTS OF
THE COMINFORM (SIC) OR COMINTERN CAME FROM SHANGHAI TO SET UP
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THE FIRST CELL". NEVERTHELESS, AFTER WWII THE COMMUNISTS

EMPHASIZED THEIR ACTIVITIES "IN THE PENINSULA". WHILE LEE DID NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY THAT SOME COMMUNIST INTELLECTUALS WERE STILL IMBEDDED IN SINGAPORE SOCIETY, HE OPINED THAT "PROVIDED THE ECONOMY DOESN'T GO DOWN...THEIR RECRUITMENT WOULD BE PATCHY".

3. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION CONCERNING THE FREQUENCY OF RECENT ARRESTS, INCLUDING THAT OF "A VERY INFLUENTIAL EDITOR" AS WELL AS "BALLET DANCERS AND EVEN MEMBERS OF YOUR ARMED FORCES" (REFTELS), LEE (APPARENTLY REFFERING TO SAMAD ISMAIL IN K.L. RATHER THAN TO HUSSEIN JAHIDIN IN SINGAPORE) IMPLIED THAT EDITOR WAS INCORRIGIBLE AS HE HAD BEEN INVOLVED WITH COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES SINCE 1950S AND HAD RETURNED TO THESE PURSUITS AFTER A PERIOD OF DETENTION AND AFTER PROMISING NOT TO DO SO. AS REGARDS THE OTHER ASSORTED DETAINEES, LEE, SEEMINGLY TO CONVEY UNCONCERN, COMMENTED: "BALLET TEACHER, WELL, YOU GET THE ODD CHARACTERS. THE SOLDIER -- HE WAS A NATIONAL SERVICEMAN AND ONLY A CORPORAL". HE REINFORCED THIS CASUAL REMARK BY ADDING THAT COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES TODAY ARE "VERY SMALL" COMPARED TO THE 1950S AND THE EARLY 1960S.

4. UNCHARACTERISTICALLY, BUT DIPLOMATICALLY, LEE DECLINED TO COMMENT ON THE RELATIVE DANGERS OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATION AND GUERILLA WARFARE IN MALAYSIA ON THE GROUNDS HE WAS "NOT COMPETENT TO PASS JUDGMENT ON WHAT IS MALAYSIA'S SPECIAL BRANCH RESPONSIBILITY".

5. COMMENT: INEVITABLY LEE'S PUBLIC REMARKS ARE LISTENED TO AND EVALUATED BY A NUMBER OF AUDIENCES. WHILE THE COMMENTS REPORTED ABOVE MAY SERVE TO REASSURE FOREIGN INVESTORS WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONFUSED BY ALL THE RECENT PUBLICITY CONCERNING THE COMMUNIST THREAT, OTHERS (ESPECIALLY FOREIGN CRITICS IN THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL) WILL SEE IN THEM CONFIRMATION THAT THE SECURITY SITUATION IN SINGAPORE DOES NOT JUSTIFY THE STRONG MEASURES USED BY THE GOS TO COMBAT SUBVERSION. LEE HIMSELF, HOWEVER, WOULD PROBABLY SEE NO CONTRADICTION, AND WOULD JUSTIFY THIS BY SAYING THAT THE ONLY REASON WHY THE SECURITY SITUATION IS SO WELL UNDER CONTROL TODAY IS THAT THE GOS IS CRACKING DOWN HARD ON SUSPECTED COMMUNISTS IN ORDER TO PREVENT A REPETITION OF THE DANGEROUS SITUATION OF THE 50'S AND EARLY 60'S. ALTHOUGH LEE'S CONFIDENT REMARKS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO THE BBC INTERVIEWER ARE WELL REASONED, EMBASSY SEES NO REASON TO ALTER EARLIER ASSESSMENT (PARA 8 OF SINGAPORE'S 4203) THAT GOS WAS BOTH ALARMED AND SURPRISED BY SURFACING OF A LARGE GROUP OF YOUNG, WELL-EDUCATED COMMUNIST SUSPECTS IN THE EARLY SUMMER. GRANT

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